

2. Narrative: Georgia's Heritage Health Index

Introduction

The Georgia Archives (lead organization) and its partners,

- Georgia Association of Museums and Galleries (GAMG),
- Georgia Department of Economic Development
- Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA),
- Georgia Humanities Council,
- Georgia Public Library Service (Office of the State Librarian),
- Society of Georgia Archivists (SGA), and
- The Southeastern Library Network (SOLINET)

propose to conduct a statewide survey of cultural institutions to measure the state of collections care and readiness for emergencies in Georgia. The survey and resulting database will address key recommendations of the Heritage Health Index (HHI) including assessing and improving storage conditions for collections, strengthening statewide emergency preparedness, heightening visibility of cultural repositories, and serving as a model for other states in the Southeast and beyond.

The goal of the planning project proposed here is to create the infrastructure for comprehensive identification and ongoing assessment of collections care and emergency preparedness at Georgia cultural institutions. The planning project will focus on gathering and updating collections and contact information for all collections-holding institutions in Georgia, developing and testing a survey instrument that will include a stair-step-type self-assessment, and expanding the Georgia Historical Records Advisory Board's (GHRAB) *Historical Organizations and Resources Directory*.

Grant partners were selected to provide a comprehensive representation of collecting institutions in Georgia (archives, libraries, museums, and historical societies), as well as organizations that can assist in promoting the importance of preservation and collections care statewide and raise the visibility of collecting repositories. Partner organizations will provide membership lists, promote the projects to their constituents, and serve on an advisory committee. The advisory committee will provide input regarding the survey tool and help to identify as many as possible of the collecting organizations in the state of Georgia, including archives, libraries, museums and historical societies (ALMHs).

1. Need and Rationale

Georgia needs a comprehensive view of collections care in the state. Only 54 collecting institutions in Georgia completed the HHI survey. Data from these repositories—estimated to represent only 22% of Georgia's repositories—cannot be considered comprehensive and may not be representative (a preponderance of the HHI respondents represent major or large institutions).

This project will extract a limited number of questions from the HHI survey, add additional questions, and provide a more comprehensive look at collections care among the state's ALMHs. The partners represent all major ALMH associations and agencies in the state and, as a result, anticipate a much higher percentage of participation in this survey than in the HHI.

Georgia needs improved disaster planning throughout the state. The HHI found that 80 percent of collecting institutions do not have a disaster plan or staff trained to carry it out. This statistic is of particular concern in Georgia, a state vulnerable to a host of potential disasters. Although Georgia has not suffered a direct hit from a major hurricane in the 20th century, it was hit by six major hurricanes in the 19th century including a Category 4 in 1898. Georgia is subject to damage from tropical storms and depressions that can impact the entire state and produce tornadoes and flooding. Georgia ranks in the top 15 states in relation to the number of tornados reported each year. The most destructive natural disaster this century was inland flooding from Tropical Storm Alberto in 1994.

Institutional data provided by the various partners will be gathered and entered into the *Historical Organizations and Resources Directory*, an online resource housed on the Georgia Archives web server (visit www.GeorgiaArchives.org and select the “Historical Orgs Directory” icon). Once entered in the Directory, a repository has password-protected access to their Directory entry and may update its information at will. In addition, the Directory entry includes two vital elements related to emergency planning. First, participants may enter private contact information, such as personal cell phone numbers and email addresses that Archives staff can access in the event of an emergency. If, for instance, the historical records repositories in Savannah are evacuated under a hurricane threat, the Directory provides information needed to contact staff. This information is hidden and is not available to the general public. Second, the address information in the Directory is being used to map repositories in a GIS system that is provided to the state’s Emergency Management Agency. This information allows GEMA personnel to pinpoint historical repositories in the event of an emergency. The GIS mapping is currently being tested using data from coastal repositories; mapping of every entry in the Directory is not likely to occur until the implementation phase of this project.

Georgia needs a way to measure its movement toward improved collections care. One goal of the survey is to create several (perhaps four or five) self-assessment steps on which each institution can gauge its position as regards to collections care (see “The Planning Process,” below). By means of this self-assessment the state’s ALMH leaders can ‘grade’ the state’s progress toward better collections care, plan training and assistance to intentionally move repositories from one step to the next, and provide incentives for repositories to move from one step to another.

Georgia needs to raise the visibility of collecting repositories. Finally, Georgia’s ALMHs are an underutilized resource in a state where tourism is a major industry. The same mapping capabilities described above (under disaster planning) can be used to encourage visits to ALMHs by Georgia residents and tourists. Higher visibility will improve collections care by increasing income to some repositories and by raising awareness—and, thereby, support—among state and local officials of the value of ALMHs to Georgia communities.

2. The Planning Process

The steps of this planning project are as follows.

(1) **Update and combine information already held by the grant partners to identify all collections-holding institutions in the state of Georgia**, including, libraries, archives, museums, historical societies, historic sites, and other collecting repositories. This information already exists in

the databases of the partner institutions and generally includes the three elements needed for the purposes of this project: institution name, address, and contact person.

To maintain this information centrally, the planning project will also **expand the database behind the *Historical Organizations and Resources Directory* to include information relative to all ALMH repositories**. Currently, the GHRAB *Historical Organizations and Resources Directory* includes primarily repositories of historical records. Expanding and populating the fields in the database to include information pertinent to all collections-holding institutions in Georgia is a major component of the planning grant. The expansion will not result in a complete redesign of the Directory, since most of the elements—fields for public hours, collecting strengths, and such—already apply to most collecting institutions. It is anticipated that a very limited number of fields must be added. For example, a “type of repository” field will be added to distinguish museums from other types of repositories. Depending on how many new entries need to be added to the Directory, data entry may continue into the implementation phase of the project. We intend to add as many entries as time permits during the planning phase.

(2) Develop and test a survey instrument to assess collections care and emergency preparedness for Georgia ALMHs. Questions believed to be most relevant to Georgia’s repositories will be selected from the HHI, and additional questions will be proposed by the grant partners. Once the survey is developed, it will be tested on a representative sample of institutions so that, in the implementation phase, it can be used to eventually survey each cultural institution statewide and issue a Georgia version of the Heritage Health Index. After the testing phase the consultant will revise the survey as needed. It is anticipated that the survey will be conducted via the internet using a tool such as Survey Monkey, to maximize the response rate.

(3) Develop a stair-step-type chart, as part of the survey instrument, by which repositories may self-assess their location within the continuum of collections care and emergency preparedness goals. The survey will be designed so that each repository can locate itself within the steps by means of selected questions similar to those found in the HHI itself. For example, within the area of preservation, the steps might be organized as follows (this is for example purposes only; no ranking has yet been determined):

- Step One – Repositories for which all or most of the following are true:
 - Repository lacks either humidity or temperature controls, or both;
 - No trained staff devoted to preservation activities;
 - No written emergency/disaster plan;
 - Preservation management (assessment, planning) is seldom practiced.
- Step Two – Repositories for which all or most of the following are true:
 - Repository has basic humidity and/or temperature controls;
 - Repository has basic security systems (staff observation, intrusion detection) in place;
 - Repository has a written emergency/disaster plan which has not been updated in the last 18 months;
 - Staff have been trained in basic preservation activities but no staff are devoted entirely to preservation activities;
 - Preservation management (assessment, planning) is seldom practiced.

- Step Three – Repositories for which all or most of the following are true: (In addition to the requirements found in *Step 2*)
 - Repository's adequate environmental controls are designed and functioning to support the preservation of the collections;
 - Repository's written disaster plan has been updated within the past 18 months;
 - Repository has one person specifically assigned to conduct preservation planning and assessment
 - Copies of vital records are identified and stored off-site.
- Step Four – Repositories for which all or most of the following are true: (In addition to the requirements found in *Step 3*)
 - Repository has at least one full-time professionally-trained preservation staff person;
 - Repository has a written, long-range preservation plan;
 - Conservation assessment, maintenance, and treatment are a regular part of collections management.

It is anticipated that development of the step chart will engender the liveliest discussions among the partners. If it is successful, it could provide the basis for measuring progress over the coming years. Training and other forms of assistance could be better planned if it were known, for instance, that the vast majority of libraries are on Step 2 and need to be brought up to Step 3.

(4) Consult with tourism agencies about how best to relay Historical Organizations and Resources Directory information to potential ALMH visitors. The Directory contains a wealth of information of interest to potential ALMH visitors, and one goal of this project is to involve tourism authorities with ALMHs in a discussion about how best to use that information to encourage visitation.

When the planning phase is completed, **the goals of the long-term implementation project** are to (1) complete the survey in every cultural institution statewide, (2) issue a Georgia version of the Heritage Health Index using the stair-steps to graphically demonstrate the state of Georgia's collections care, (3) complete the updating of the *Historical Organizations and Resources Directory* to include all collections-holding institutions in Georgia (4) map those institutions in the Georgia Emergency Management Agency's GIS system, and (5) link the Directory information to the state's tourism agencies to promote the importance of cultural resources in the state. On an ongoing basis, the state's ALMH agencies and associations will use the stair-step information to plan the steps required to move all collections-holding institutions to the top step in the Collections Care and Emergency Preparedness Chart and keep the Directory entries current.

3. Project Resources and Budget

The **Georgia Archives** is well positioned to take a leadership role in statewide preservation and emergency planning in Georgia. The Archives has a mature preservation program with two professional staff members, a preservation manager and a conservator. It has an active outreach program that provides presentations and training on a variety of preservation topics. In addition to training on disaster preparedness, preservation staff will review disaster plans for any cultural organization in Georgia. In 2005, the Archives began offering to store back-up copies of emergency plans for historical organizations in its Disaster Plan Bank. These plans are stored in a secure, climate-controlled vault and are made available to authorized persons from that institution in the event of disaster. In addition, the Director of the Archives recently assumed responsibility for the state's

Capitol Museum, a merger that bodes particularly well for statewide collaboration among archives and museums.

In the past few years, and in particular, since the 2005 hurricane season, the Archives has been involved in several national and statewide disaster preparedness initiatives. Archives staff have been involved heavily in the Council of State Archivists' (CoSA) Emergency Preparedness Initiative. This project conducted a nationwide assessment of the emergency readiness of state archives and produced the PReP (Pocket Response Plan), which has been described as a model cooperative project.

In 2007, the Preservation Services Manager and the Conservator co-chaired the committee that brought Heritage Preservation's Alliance for Response Forum to Atlanta. The forum, held on 8 February 2007, attracted 75 participants from the cultural and first responder communities in metropolitan Atlanta to discuss emergency preparedness. Archives staff serve on the steering committee of the Heritage Emergency Response Alliance (HERA), the cooperative that formed after the conference.

The partners in this project comprehensively represent archives, public and academic libraries, museums, historical societies, and historic sites of Georgia, as well as organizations that can assist in promoting the importance of preservation and collections care and raise the visibility of collecting repositories. For additional information, see the partnership statements and organizational profiles in the appendices.

The Georgia Archives will lead the management of this project, provide office space and computer equipment for the consultant and project assistant, and host the advisory committee meetings. Christine Wiseman, Preservation Services Manager since 2002, will serve as the project manager, and will dedicate time overseeing and reporting on this project. Beth Patkus, a consultant based in Poughkeepsie, NY, has agreed to serve as the consultant on the project. Beth is responsible for developing and testing the survey instrument, as well as incorporating the stair-step chart into the survey. The majority of the research and writing can be done from home, while maintaining contact with project staff in Atlanta via phone and email. She will travel to Atlanta three times during the project to meet with project staff and the advisory committee made up of representatives from the partner organizations. A project assistant will be hired to gather the contact information for the database, standardize and check it against the current directory information, work with the database developer to add necessary fields, and begin to enter new data into the directory. Other project staff include Tina Seetoo, Conservator at the Georgia Archives, who will serve as an assistant project manager and work with the advisory committee; and Pronati Debnath, Database Administrator, who will provide the programming needed to expand the GHRAB Directory and assist with any technical aspects related to developing the survey instrument.